

❖ GILBERT, PHYSICIAN: A NOTE
PREPARED FOR THE THREE-HUN-
DREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
DEATH OF WILLIAM GILBERT OF
COLCHESTER, PRESIDENT OF THE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS, &
PHYSICIAN TO QUEEN ELIZABETH,
BY SILVANUS P. THOMPSON, F.R.S.

William Gilbert



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GILBERT: PHYSICIAN.



IN the existing scanty biographical notices of Dr. Gilbert there is an entire absence of any account of his work or career as a physician, saving a bare record of the offices which he held in the Royal College of Physicians, culminating in his Presidency in 1599, and of the fact of his appointment as Physician to Queen Elizabeth in 1601. Nevertheless search has revealed a number of other facts as to his medical career, and affords some hints for further inquiry. Indeed it is now possible to construct a brief history of his professional life.

After a residence of eleven years at St. John's College, Cambridge, during which time he had become a Fellow of his College and Mathematical Examiner, he was admitted on May 13th, 1569,

to the degree of M.D. On December 21st of the same year he was elected Senior Fellow, and on January 22nd, was chosen Senior Bursar. Not many months afterwards he left Cambridge and entered upon a period of foreign travel, lasting till about 1573, when he settled down to practise in London.

“In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,” writes Dr. Willis, the biographer of Harvey, “France and Italy boasted medical schools of higher repute than any in Europe: and to one or other of these must the young Englishman who dedicated himself to physic repair, in order to furnish himself with the lore that was indispensable in his profession.”

Of all that happened to Gilbert during his three years of foreign travel nothing is known for certain, except that he visited Italy, and made acquaintance with many of the learned men of his time. That he occupied himself with the study of the magnet in pursuit of those life-long investigations which culminated in the publication of his famous book *De Magnete*, may be taken as indubitable. But how far he devoted himself whilst in Italy to the pursuit of medical knowledge is quite uncertain. It has been conjectured that he attended at Padua the anatomical demonstrations of the celebrated Fabricius ab Aquapendente. It

has also been inferred from slender clues that he followed the teachings of Mercurialis on poisons. Certain it is that he gained a familiar knowledge of the medical writers of that time, Cardan of Milan, Fallopius, Fracastorio, and of various writers of herbals, Matthiolus, Manardus, Garzias ab Horto, and Filippo Costa of Mantua. In his writings he frequently quotes from foreign medical authorities, from the Pharmacopœia of the Augsбург physicians, from Paulus Aegineta, and from Cordus and other commentators on Galen, Dioscorides and Avicenna. For the recipes of Nicolaus Myrepus, whose "divine plaster" consisted of powdered loadstone mixed with litharge, he had as little respect as for those of Paracelsus, who recommended the loadstone-powder as a cure for stab-wounds. From the Italians, too, he probably acquired the repugnance to the teachings of Paracelsus and of Albertus Magnus which asserts itself throughout his writings; while he scoffed at Arnoldus de Villanova, the great writer of the school of Salerno. Howsoever these things be, Gilbert returned to England a pronounced hater of shams and of quackery, a champion of the experimental method, and an outspoken enemy of all those who merely relied on the authority of great names.

When Gilbert set up in London the College of Physicians was flourishing in the "Stone House" once the residence of Linacre, in Knight Rider Street, near to the spot where it is crossed by the city lane called Godliman Street. Gilbert settled down in the adjoining lane of Peter's Hill, which led from St. Paul's Church Yard, across Knight Rider Street, to Upper Thames Street. Peter's Hill nowadays ends in Queen Victoria Street, just to the east of the College of Arms, the habitat of Gilbert's friend and fellow-collegian, Robert Cooke, Clarenceux Herald. The Doctor's house in Peter's Hill was called Wingfield House, but the date when he acquired it is uncertain. His step-mother was a Wingfield, and she, surviving her husband, lived on at Colchester until 1589. Possibly Dr. Gilbert did not purchase Wingfield House before 1583, the date of the death of his father Hierome Gilbert (Recorder of Colchester), when he came into extensive properties in Essex and Suffolk. This is however known, that Wingfield House was frequented by numerous friends and acquaintances who formed a kind of College or Society around Gilbert as their head. Several younger men are known to have resided with the Doctor at different times, amongst them his cousin George Gilbert, the founder of the

Catholic Association; Dr. Giffope, who assisted him in his writings on the magnet; and, later, John Chamberlain, the writer of many gossiping letters, of which more hereafter. Gilbert's relations with other English physicians must have been extensive and intimate. As a student at Cambridge he had doubtless come under the enduring influences of the famous Dr. Caius, the founder of Caius College. At the head of the College of Physicians, when he came to London, were such men as Dr. Gifford and Dr. Caldwell. Harvey was not yet born. Gilbert was admitted to the Fellowship of the Royal College about 1576, but the date is uncertain. In 1577 he obtained from the Queen, through Robert Cooke, a grant of armorial bearings. The first glimpse that we have of his rising eminence in his profession is in 1581 in a document preserved amongst the Talbot and Cecil papers.¹ This is a letter, dated January 25th of that year, from the Earl of Shrewsbury to Thomas Bawdewine:

"I have thought good . . . to send the letter unto you, which I would have you keep safe. This gentleman, Dr. Gilbert, was sent from Her Majesty by my Lord of Leicester's means. His

¹ Lodge's *Illustrations of History, Biography and Manners in the Reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary, Elizabeth, and James I.* (1838), vol. ii., p. 200.

coming was too late, and therefore his abode short, though I could have been pleased to have had him longer. I have spoken to him to send me some biscuit bread, which is not made by common poticars [apothecaries], and also a serecloth to use for my gout, which he has promised me to send. See him well recompensed, for surely, for this small talk I had with him, I have found him a sensible man; therefore seek to be acquainted with him, and be very friendly of him."

This letter related to the death of the Earl of Shrewsbury, who suffered from an extremely complicated disorder, and died before Gilbert could arrive.

In 1581 also, Gilbert was chosen as one of the Censors of the Royal College, an office which he held until 1590.

In the British Museum, bound up with a number of contemporary medical tracts, several of which are inscribed with the words "Gabrielis Harveij et amicorum," there is a single small folio page of print dated 1582, bearing the following title:

"An excellent, perfect, and an approoved medicine and waie to helpe and cure the stone in the raines."

Then follow, in English, four separate recipes. At the foot is this inscription printed:

"This was written at the request of maister Simon Boyer, one of the Gentlemen vschers to hir most excellent Maiestie, by a friend of his that tried the same upon his own bodie, and hath

found great helpe therein; and hath thereby holpen manie thereof. G. G. Printed for Thomas Chard 1582.”

Is it possible that the “G. G.” who writes these prescriptions was none other than Gulielmus Gilbertus? He was, as we have seen, already known at Court. No other recipes have come down to us as the prescriptions of Dr. Gilbert, though the name of Gilbert crops up in some collected by Elias Ashmole, and now preserved amongst the remains of that erratic collector with the manuscripts in the Bodleian Library. But these on examination prove to refer to another Gilbert, a fourteenth-century physician known as Gilbertus Anglicus, whose *Compendium Medicinæ* was printed in Lyon in 1510.

In 1584 we find Dr. William Gilbert and Dr. Lancelot Browne conjointly signing a medical certificate, which is preserved in His Majesty's Record Office. It runs thus:

“To the Right honnourable Sir ffrauncis Walsingham, Knight & principall Secretarye to her Ma^{tie}.

“Pleaseth it yo^r Honno^r to be advertised That whereas wee are required by this Gent M^r Hungait, to delyver o^r opinions, as concerninge the cause of his desire to travyll beyonde the seas, True it is, that we have advised him therevnto, as thinkinge his beinge, for some tyme in hotte and drye Countryes, will much staye the rage and flux of his cold and Rhumatike diseases, w^h

yb longe obfervation, both he and wee have founde, to abounde
moft, when the weather is colde and Intemperate, And thus moft
humblye takinge oʳ leaves wee comitt yoʳ Honnoʳ to the tuition
of the Almighty, London this firft of Februarye 1584

“Yoʳ Honnoʳs moft

“redely to comaunde

“WILLM GYLBERD

“LANCELOT BROWNE.”

In 1587 Gilbert became Treafurer of the Royal
College of Phyficians, and held the office till 1592.

That Gilbert was in request for advice as to
difeafes not familiar to ordinary praftitioners is
fhown by his name being included in the next year
amongft four felected to advife the Privy Council¹
as to fome difeafe that had broken out in the Fleet.
The Acts of the Privy Council for March 28th,
1588, include the following record:

“A letter to the Prefident of the Colledge of the Doftors of
Phyficke that whereas a dyfeafe and ficknes began to encrease in
her Majefties Navye, for remedie of the dyfeafed and for ftate of
further contagion their Lordships thought meet that fome lerned
and skillfull phificians fhould prefently be fent thether; and for
that their Lordships hard that good reporte of the fufficiency,
learninge and care of D^r Gilbert, D^r Marbeck, D^r Browne
and D^r Wilkinfon, as they were thought very fytt perfons to be

¹ *Acts of the Privy Council of England*. New Series, vol. xvi.,
1588, p. 5. Edited by J. R. Dasent, C.B. 1897.

employed in the said Navye to have care of the helthe of the noblemen, gentlemen, and others in that service, therefore he was required forthwith upon the receipt of their Lordships' letters to call before him the forenamed Doctors, and to make choyse of any two of them, whoe were to be willed to put them selves presently in a readynes to goe downe to the Navye, and to carry with them a convenyent quantytie of all soche drogues as should be fyt for medycine and cure; and uppon their repaier and conference with the Lord Admyrall soche order should be taken for their entertainment as should be to their contentment."

History does not record which of the four named were chosen. But it is significant that Gilbert's name stands first. Dr. Browne is doubtless the Lancelot Browne who signed the certificate previously quoted. Lancelot Browne was himself made President of the Royal College on Gilbert's death in 1603, and later became father-in-law of the celebrated Harvey. Dr. Marbeck later became one of the Queen's physicians, and Dr. Wilkin-son preceded Harvey as Physician to St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

In the year 1588 is also recorded¹ the presence of "Wilhelmi Gilberti, medicinæ doctoris" professionally at the birth of Katherine, daughter of Michael Heneage, by his wife Susan Honeywood, at his house in the parish of St. Katherine Colman,

¹ Nichol's *Topographical Genealogies*, II. 173.

London. Michael Heneage was Keeper of the Records in the Tower.

On October 10th, 1589, the Royal College of Physicians decided to take up the compilation of a Pharmacopœia. The record in Dr. Marbeck's *Annals of the College* runs :

“Propositum, deliberatum, et conclusum est, ut unum aliquod publicum ac uniforme Dispensatorium sive Receptorum Magistralium formula officinis sequenda constituatur.”

The various departments were assigned to various groups of physicians. Electuaries and opiates were assigned to the President and Dr. Wilkinson; syrups, juleps and decoctions to Drs. Atflowe, Browne, Farmery and Preeft; powders and sweetmeats to the royal physicians; pills to Dr. Gilbert and Dr. Turner; lozenges and eye-falves to Dr. Marbeck and Dr. James. Two months later, when the work had progressed a committee of six was appointed to revise the work for issue; the six being Dr. Foster, Dr. Johnson, Dr. Turner, Dr. Gilbert, Dr. Browne and Dr. James. After five years a second committee was appointed to examine the Dispensatorium, Gilbert being again a member. For some reason the work was delayed, and the *Pharmacopœia Londinensis* made its first appearance in 1618. One item in it would

assuredly not have been sanctioned by Dr. Gilbert, namely the *Emplastrum divinum* of Nicolaus, consisting of powdered loadstone made up with wax, oil, litharge and various spices. Gilbert had, in the fourteenth chapter of *De Magnete*, denounced the prescription of loadstone in unsparing terms: "abominable imposture," "false and idle conjecture," "an evil and deadly advice," are his phrases. He appreciated the medicinal value of iron, which he recommended as dissolved in vinegar, for laxity of the liver, for anæmia, and as an astringent and ficcative. But as to the alleged medicinal value of the magnet he denounced it roundly.

"Some physicians have opined that a loadstone has power to extract the iron of an arrow from the human body. But it is when whole that the loadstone draws, not when pulverized and formless, buried in powders; for it does not attract by reason of its material, but is rather adapted for the healing of open wounds, by reason of exsiccation, closing up and drying the sore, an effect by which the arrow-heads would be retained in the wounds. Thus vainly and preposterously do the sciolists look for remedies while ignorant of the true causes of things. The application of a loadstone for all sorts of headaches no more cures them (as some make out) than would an iron helmet or a steel cap. To give it in a draught to dropical persons is an error of the ancients, or an impudent tale of the copyists, though one kind of ore may be found which, like many more minerals, purges the stomach; but this is due to some defect of that ore and not to

any medical property." (*De Magnete*, p. 32, quoted from English version of 1900.)

In January, 1597, as we learn from the Hatfield Manuscripts,¹ Gilbert was in attendance upon Lady Cecil in her last illness. An untoward event occurred during this visit. For a jewel belonging to Lady Cecil was discovered to be missing, and one Richard Wesson (or Weston), who accompanied Dr. Gilbert, apparently as his servant, was accused of being concerned in purloining it, and was examined on a charge of having sold it. There is some doubt as to the relation of this man with the Doctor; for though the narrative would suggest that he was Gilbert's servant, Gilbert had a nephew of the name of Richard Weston, a son of his step-brother Rev. Richard Weston.

It is not known whether Gilbert practised medicine in Colchester as well as in London. The siege of Colchester, in 1648, destroyed so many public and private records that little remains that is of service in gathering up the threads of history. That he retained possession, after the death of his step-mother in 1589, of the family house called "Tymperleys" in Trinity Street, and occasionally resided there, is well attested. He became in fact

¹ Hatfield MSS. Cal., vol. vii., p. 356.

its most prominent citizen. Lilly's *History of his Life and Times* (p. 73) contains the following note:

"In this year 1633 I became acquainted with Nicholas Fiske, a licentiate in physick, who was born in Suffolk, near Fram[1]ingham Castle, of very good parentage, who educated him at County schools, until he was fit for the University. But he went not to the Academy, studying at home both astrology and medicine, which he afterwards practised in Colchester; and was there acquainted with Dr. Gilbert, who wrote *De Magnete*."

In 1597 Gilbert again became Treasurer of the Royal College, holding that office until 1599. On March 3rd, 1597, he was also elected Consiliarius in the place of Dr. Gifford, deceased.

In 1597 we begin to learn something of Gilbert's life at his house in Peter's Hill from the gossiping letters of John Chamberlain. This person appears to have been an idle gentleman, a frequenter of the Court, and a favoured visitor at country houses. His letters to his friend Dudley Carleton (afterwards Lord Dorchester), many of which are preserved amongst the State papers, are dated, some from Wingfield House (Dr. Gilbert's), some from Knebworth (the house of Rowland Lytton, a friend of Gilbert's), some from Sir Henry Wallop's house at Farley, and others from various other places. Those of the letters which were

written during the reign of Elizabeth have been published by the Camden Society,¹ while a number of the later letters appear in Birch's *Court and Times of James I.* These letters though they form a chronicle less intimate and less scandalous than the Diary of Pepys, afford a graphic picture of the life of London in that day. They tell of the doings both at Court and in the busy neighbourhood of St. Paul's, which at that time was the centre of all the gossip of the hour. The idle fellows and newsmongers met even in the aisles of St. Paul's itself and walked about, and talked over the latest scandal and the news from Spain or the Low Countries. Gamblers met to play, and fell to quarrelling over their games even within the precincts.

Chamberlain's letters begin in the year 1597. In June he sent to Carleton, then an attaché of the English ambassador in Paris, a long chatty letter in which, along with miscellaneous news of town and country, he repeats a witticism from the caustic tongue of Dr. Gilbert concerning one Hugh Beeston, who was to be treasurer to a secret expedition of fifteen of the Queen's ships:—"I doubt he shall not be troubled with much receipt, for I

¹ *Letters written by John Chamberlain during the Reign of Queen Elizabeth.* Edited by Sarah Williams; Camden Soc., 1861.

am of our Doctor's opinion, that warrants him, if he have it, that a well-fadled rat may cary all his accompts." Chamberlain's letters, as is natural in one who lived in the house of the fashionable physician, show a curiously close acquaintance with the maladies and deaths of the personages of his narrative. He tells how Lady Norris was brought abed of three daughters; how Sir John North died on Sunday last; how Justice Beaumont and Serjeant Drew that rode the northern circuit "are bothe dead of some infection of the gaile"; how Sir John Brocket lies languishing and will not hold out long. On January 17th, 1598, he announces the death of Sir Mathew Arundell, and adds that Spenser, "our principall poet, died at Westminster on Satterday last." Did Gilbert attend Spenser in his last illness? Chamberlain merely records the decease thus succinctly. In the middle of the summer of 1600 London was visited by a slight attack of the plague. On July 1st, Chamberlain wrote from London, to Carleton at Witam: "Mrs. Elizabeth Russell lies at the last cast, and is either dienge or dead." She was daughter of Lord John Russell and a goddaughter of Queen Elizabeth. In point of fact she died the next day.

The next letter was dated October 10th, 1600.

“This towne is as empty as if it were dead vacation, no body at the Doctors, nobody in Powles, *solitudo ante ostium* in Little Britain, and all as close and quiet as if it were midnight.” On the 3rd of February, 1600 (1601 new style), comes an important letter. First it announces the death of Michael Heneage, at whose daughter’s birth Gilbert had been present professionally in 1588, and adds that “his office of keping of the records of the Towre was promised to Dr. James of the Court.” Dr. James was, as we have seen, one of the four recommended in 1588 as doctors to the Navy. But Dr. James died only a fortnight after Michael Heneage. Then comes a great piece of news consequent on the death of Dr. James. “The Quene hath made choise of our Doctor for her phisition, but he is not yet sworne. I doubt our colledge wilbe dissolved, and some of us sent to seek our fortune.” “Our colledge” surely refers to the gathering of younger men wont to meet weekly at Wingfield House, whence Chamberlain was writing. On February 24th, 1600-1, he again wrote concerning “our ill newes,” on which Carleton had, it appears, already replied. Chamberlain wrote: “I was out of the way when your letter came, and when the messenger gave warn-

ing of his sodain departure, for the covie is now disperfed, and we are driven to finding our feeding further off, our Doctör being alredy fetled in Court, and I redy to go to Askot, and there and in fuch like places to lead a country life." He concludes with a fcrap of curious medical intelligence, and dates his letter, "From my lodging at Wingfield Houfe in more then poft hafte." Chamberlain did not, however, leave Wingfield Houfe at once, for his letters continued to be dated thence until July 8th, 1601, when he wrote about the ficknefs of Sir Edward Norris, and mentions incidentally how their mutual friend "Mr. Bodley fets up his fhop in Oxford, and opens his library to the number of three or fowre thoufand volumes."

Gilbert had been fteadily attaining the fummit of his profeffion, and as we have feen had been for fome years in request in high quarters. The Hatfield Manuscripts, which recorded his attendance on Lady Cecil, fhew¹ that he alfo attended Lord Burghley on his death-bed. A week before his death, under date July 26th, 1598, one wrote: "Doctör Gilbert and Serjeant (*ſic*) Goodrooſe are now with him." He had the ſame day requested that either Mr. Baker or Mr. Goodrooſe, the Queen's

¹ Hatfield MSS. Cal., viii. p. 277.

surgeons might be sent with as much speed as possible.

In 1599 Dr. Gilbert was made President of the Royal College. In the same year he attended Lady Derby for an attack of ague. His report on her case, written to Sir Robert Cecil, the only known letter in Gilbert's autograph, is preserved amongst the Cecil manuscripts at Hatfield.

In 1600 Gilbert was consulted by Hakluyt, the traveller and historian of the voyages of explorers, as to the publication of a handbook on tropical diseases, for travellers. The same year saw the publication of his famous treatise¹ *De Magnete*, which he had had by him for eighteen years, and which embodied the fruits of his long researches.

¹ The full title is: *Guilielmi Gilberti Colcestrensis, medici Londinensis, De Magnete, magneticisque corporibus, et de magno magnete tellure, Physiologia nova, plurimis et argumentis, et experimentis demonstrata.* Londini. Excudebat Petrus Short Anno MDC. It was published at 7s. 6d., but is now excessively rare, and is worth from £10 to £20 in the market. The Gilbert Club has issued to its members an English Edition, of which the title is: *William Gilbert of Colchester, physician of London. On the Magnet, magnetick bodies also, and on the great magnet the earth; a new Physiology, demonstrated by many arguments and experiments.* London. Imprinted at the Chiswick Press Anno MCM. This is a page for page translation with all the illustrations in facsimile. Another translation by Dr. P. F. Mottelay was published in New York in 1893.

For years he had collected loadstones and minerals: had experimented with them, and possessed himself of a wealth of experimental data. Living a bachelor, and enjoying an ample income, Gilbert was able to spend money freely upon his experiments. In his book he records how, on one occasion, he surrounded a loadstone with seventy diamonds in order to test the oft-repeated but wholly mythical assertion that the magnet loses its power in the presence of a diamond. According to Harvey,¹ Gilbert expended no less a sum than five thousand pounds on his researches, and had amassed also a collection of maps and books in his house on Peter's Hill. His printer, Peter Short,² lived "at the sign of the Starre" on Bread Street Hill, within a stone's throw of Wingfield House, probably at the corner of the blind alley still called Star Court. The publication of *De Magnete* took place in the year³ 1600, as appears from the follow-

¹ See Morhof, *Polyhistor*, ed. tertius, Lubecæ, 1732, T. ii., p. 410. Compare also the statement in the *Epistola ad Cartesium* prefixed to the work of Descartes *de Passionibus Animæ*, Amstel., 1685.

² See a paper by the present writer on *Peter Short, Printer, and his Marks*, printed in the Transactions of the Bibliographical Society, 1898.

³ Probably on April 6th, that being the date inserted by Gilbert in two presentation copies, one given to Lancelot Browne, the other to Thomas Langton.

ing passage in the "Epistle Dedicatorie" of the third volume¹ of Hakluyt's *Voyages*, dated September 1st, 1600:

"To leaue this point, I was once minded to haue added to the end of these my labours a short treatise, which I haue lying by me in writing, touching *The curing of hot diseases incident to traueilers in long and Southerne voyages*, written in English by one M. George Wateson, But being carefull to do nothing herein rashly, I shewed it to my worshipfull friend M. doctör Gilbert, a gentleman no lesse excellent in the chiefeſt secrets of the Mathematicks (as that rare iewell lately ſet foorth by him in Latine doeth euidently declare) then in his owne profeſſion of phyſicke: who aſſured me, after hee had peruſed the ſaid treatiſe, that it was very defectiue and vnperfect, and that if hee might haue leaſure, which that argument would require, he would either write ſomething thereof more himſelfe, or would conferre with the whole Colledge of Phyſicians, and ſet downe ſome order by common conſent, for the preferuation of her Maieſties ſubjects."

In 1601, as recorded by Chamberlain, Gilbert was appointed Phyſician to the Queen. F. G. Waldron, in *The Biographical Mirror*, vol. ii., p. 33 (1796), ſays:

"His ſucceſs and great reputation having ſecured the attention of Queen Elizabeth, ſhe ſent for him to Court, appointed him her phyſician in ordinary, and gave him beſides, an annual penſion to encourage him in his ſtudies."

¹ Hakluyt, *The Third and Laſt Volume of the Voyages . . . of the Engliſh Nation*. Imp. at London . . . 1600, p. A 3.

On the mural tablet erected after his death by his brothers, the inscription runs: "Artem medicam summis laudibus parique fœlicitate per triginta plusque annos Londini exercuit. Hinc aulam accercitus in summum reginæ Elizabethæ favorem receptus fuit, cui ut Successori regi Jacobo servivit archiatros." Archiatros would denote *chief* physician. But his claim to bear that title is ambiguous; and the statement that the Queen's purpose in bestowing an annual pension upon him was to encourage him in his studies (a statement derived from Fuller), is also open to question. The patent-roll recording his appointment is in the Record Office, and is thus entered in the Calendar: "43 *Eliz.* 21 *Apr.* [1601-2] *Wm. Gilbert offic. unus medicor^m ad vit. Pr. S.*"

The patent-roll itself has been examined. It sets out the appointment, with emolument "centum libros," to be paid on the feasts of the Annunciation, St. John Baptist, St. Michael and All Angels, and the Nativity, and is for the term of his natural life. It is near the beginning of the roll and occupies about six or seven inches of the parchment. The name "William Gilbert" is in the margin. One hundred pounds per annum appears to have been the regular stipend of each of the Queen's

physicians in ordinary, though not the invariable amount. For instance the following are found in *Burghley's Notes of the Reign of Elizabeth* (Murdin's *Burghley's State Papers*):

Page 800, 1592, December; "Richard Smith, Dr in Physick, admitted to be the Queen's ordinary Physition, with 100*l.* per annum."

Page 806, 1594, October; "Dr. James appointed Phisition to the Q. Household, with the Fee of 50*l.* per annum."

The statement is further made by Morant¹ that Queen Elizabeth at her death left a pension to Dr. Gilbert, and that he was the only man mentioned in her will. This statement is also open to question: for no will of Queen Elizabeth is known to exist.

Gilbert does not seem to have accompanied the Queen in any of her Progresses. In the records of these the names of her Doctors are given, as receiving or presenting New Year's gifts; for example Dr. Gifford, Dr. Lopus, and Dr. Bayles in 1588-9; and Dr. James and Dr. Browne in 1599-1600, with three Apothecaries who presented green ginger, orange flowers, boxes of preservatives, and "potts of preserved pears."

¹ Quoted by Sir B. W. Richardson in the *Asclepiad*, 1887, p. 218.

In the roll of the Queen's New Year Gifts, 1602-3, we have the entry:

"By Mr Doct^r Gilberte one pott of Orange floures and another of greene ginger delivered to the said Lady Scudamore."

At the same time Master Doct^r Paddie presented "one fanne of white feathers, the handle cristall garnished with gold like a crowne," and Mr. Weston, apothecary, "three boxes of peaches of Janna and fuche like confections." The Queen acknowledged these gifts by others that are set out in the roll amongst the presents to "gentlemen," wherein we find:

"To Mr Doct^r Gilberte in guilt plate, w. xiiij oz iij q^urters "

"To Mr Weston apothecary in guilt plate x oz iij q^urters."

The Master Doct^r Browne received the same as Master Doct^r Gilbert, while two other Master Doct^rs, Marbecke and Paddie had pieces of plate weighing fifteen ounces odd.

There can be little doubt that Gilbert was amongst the group of physicians who attended the Queen in her last illness. The historians of Elizabeth have left us a graphic, if rather terrible, picture of her last days. How she alternated between fits of rage and periods of silence and stupor. How

she railed at her physicians and her counsellors, refusing food, refusing physic, refusing even to rest. Shortly before the end she sat obstinately silent for four days and nights on her cushions outside the door of her chamber, in spite of the endeavours of the ladies of the bed-chamber to induce her to go to bed. Chamberlain's letters raise the curtain on the scene, in a narrative which clearly indicates the source of his information by one illuminating phrase: "I had good means to understand how the world went." This particular letter, dated March 30th, 1603, is printed in Birch's *Court and Times of James I.*, p. 2.

"I doubt not but you shall hear her Majesty's sickness and manner of death diversely related. For even here the Papists do tell strange stories, as utterly void of truth as of all civil honesty or humanity. I had good means to understand how the world went and find her disease to be nothing but a settled and unremovable melancholy, insomuch that she could not be won or persuaded neither by counsels, divines, physicians, nor the women about her, once to taste or touch any physic, though ten or twelve physicians that were continually about her did assure her with all manner of asseverations of perfect and easy recovery, if she would follow their advice. So that it cannot be said of her, as it was of the Emperor Hadrian, that *turba medicorum occidit regem*, for they say she died only for lack of physic."

In the British Museum there is preserved a long roll upon which Camden, the Herald, has drawn

in ink an elaborate representation of the funeral procession of the Queen.¹ Few of the hundreds of figures represented can claim to be regarded as portraits; but there is one group that claims attention; four men, walking together, labelled Clerks of Parliament and Doctors of Physic. One of the four, with pointed beard, ruff, and hat as in the engraved portrait² by Clamp, irresistibly recalls Dr. Gilbert, who must have been personally well known to Camden, Wingfield House being but a few paces from the Heralds' College.

Gilbert was appointed Physician in Chief to James I., with a continuance of his stipend.

Queen Elizabeth had died on 24th of March, and the summer which followed brought a fresh

¹ Reproduced in twenty-seven plates by the Society of Antiquaries in 1791.

² This portrait was published by S. and E. Harding in 1796 in the *Biographical Mirror*. This is the very year in which (according to the manuscript entry at Oxford), the original portrait was removed as decayed. The original portrait, probably painted by Cornelius Jansen, bore the date "1591, ætatis 48." It is mentioned by the antiquary Hearn in his *Letter containing an Account of some Antiquities between Windsor and Oxford, with a list of the several Pictures in the School Gallery Adjoining the Bodleian Library*, 1708, p. 33; and also in Poynter's *Oxoniensis Academia*, 1748, entry No. 74. See also A. à Wood, *History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*, vol. ii., p. 96, 1796.

visitation upon the city, for 1603 was also a plague year. On July 10th, 1603, Chamberlain wrote:

“Paul’s grows very thin, for every man shrinks away, and I am half ashamed to see myself left alone. Our pageants are pretty forward, but most of them are such small-timbered gentlemen that they cannot last long, and I doubt not, if the plague cease not sooner, they will rot and sink where they stand.”

Before October Chamberlain had left town, and had gone to the house of a cousin at Hinton, whence he wrote to Carleton, pressing him to follow. The plague was inconsiderable until the last week in June. The King retired to Wilton near Salisbury, and a proclamation was issued expressly forbidding all persons at Court to repair thither till winter. This did not, however, prevent the Royal ceremony of Coronation on St. James’s day, July 25th, when the Lord Mayor and twelve principal citizens were admitted to attend the solemnity; but all other citizens were stopped from passing by land or water for fear of infection. In August, September and October the plague raged, and in one week in September no fewer than three thousand persons died. The total number who died in this visitation, in the City of London and liberties, was thirty thousand five hundred and seventy-eight.

The last occasions on which Gilbert attended

meetings of the Royal College of Physicians were on May 4th and June 6th, 1603. At the former of these Harvey presented himself as a candidate for admission. He was refused: for though when examined he answered all questions sufficiently well, he was considered not yet to have had sufficient practical experience.

There is no certainty as to the cause of Gilbert's death; but the circumstances lend probability to the belief that he died of the plague. He was only in his sixtieth year. It is not certain even whether he died in London or in Colchester, though the latter is the more probable. His death occurred on November 30th, old style, which date is the same as December 10th of our present calendar, the date given by Morant (*History of Essex*, i., 435). He was buried in the chancel of the church of Holy Trinity, Colchester.

It is quite inconceivable that Chamberlain, who had such intimate relations with Gilbert, should not have sent to their mutual friend Carleton some account of his illness and death. But no such letter has been found. Indeed, Chamberlain seems to have been out of London, for on December 22nd, Carleton, who was passing through London from Winchester to Hampton Court, wrote as follows,

“from Waterfons fhop,” to Chamberlain at Knebworth :

“We fear we fhall now ftumble into the ficknefs which evil we have miraculoufly efaped. Hither I came to hear what newes of our friends, but find defolation in every corner, and at your Doctōrs more than any where elie. Onely I met with good newes that all is well where you are, w^{ch} I was moft glad of, and wifh myfelf wth you though it were but for an hower to know what you have done, and requite you wth my adventures fince I faw you. There is nothing here worth the fending to you for y^r Doctōrs man tels me he hath ftored you wth all the plaguy pamphlets and I can find no other novelty. . . .”

There is, however, a brief contemporary note of the event in the Talbot and Cecil papers¹ at Hatfield, in a letter written to the Earl of Shrewfbury by Sir Michael Hicks (who had been Secretary to Queen Elizabeth), dated from Ruckholts, Effex, December 6th (*i.e.* 16th of the prefent calendar), 1603.

“I heard as I was writing here of that Doctōr Gilbert, the phyfician, is dead, who was my neighbour at St. Peter’s Hill. He was a learned phyfician, and an honeft. The ficknefs is greatly decreafed in London, and the citizens do return daily in great numbers.”

The affociation in the mind of the writer be-

¹ *Talbot and Cecil Papers*, iii., p. 79.

tween Gilbert's death and the ravages of the plague has a significance that cannot be missed.

The Oxford Epigrammatist, John Owen (Audoenus), who had already penned¹ one savage couplet against Gilbert on account of his Copernican views, wrote a second one,² with the unkindly title *Physician, Heal Thyself*. The first imputes to him drunkenness, the second avarice. Dryden treated him better when he wrote:

“Gilbert shall live till loadstones cease to draw,
Or British fleets the boundless Ocean awe.”

Gilbert's will shows that he was not unmindful of his fellows in the profession of medicine. It was made on his fifty-ninth birthday, the 24th of May, 1603. Gilbert died wealthy. To the family properties which he had inherited he had added others by purchase, and these were carefully allotted in his will to his surviving brothers and

¹

Ad D. Gilbertum.

Stare negas terram; nobis miracula narras:

Hæc cum scribebas, in rate forsan eras.

(*Epigrammatum Joannis Owen, Lib. i., Epigr. 14.*)

²

Medice cura teispum. Ad Gilbertum.

Ut teispum cures frustra, Gilberte, moneris;

Est tibi nam semper maxima cura tui.

(*Epigrammatum Joannis Owen, Lib. ii., Epigr. 82.*)

sisters, and other relations. After the numerous family bequests come the following:

“Item. I geve to the Colledge of Phisitions in London all my bookes in my Librarye, my Globes, and Instrumentes, and my Cabenet of myneralles. And I geve Sixe poundes to the Treasorer of the Colledge towards chardges of remoovinge and bestowinge them in the Colledge Librarye.

“Item. I geve Sixe poundes Thirteen shillings foure pence the next quarter daye after my deathe to be bestowed by the Treasurer of the Colledge to make them a dynner.”

This dinner was duly held on August 9th, 1604, and after the dinner Dr. Harvey was again examined and admitted to the Fellowship of the College, subject to the payment of the usual fees.

Let it be recorded also that Gilbert left a piece of plate of the value of six pounds to his friend John Chamberlain, and the like to Master Doctor Barnesdale.¹ His house in Peter's Hill he left to his sister Agnes Smyth.

In 1614 the College of Physicians was removed to Amen Corner. It is not definitely known how Gilbert's bequests fared in their removal, or how they were cared for in the building subsequently erected by Harvey on this site.

The Catalogue of the Library of the Royal College of Physicians, printed in 1660, includes

¹ Dr. W. Baronisdale, who had been President, 1589.

a large number, at least thirty or forty, of the magnetical books mentioned in *De Magnete*; but it is silent as regards Gilbert's globes, minerals and instruments, though it records a number of surgical instruments, and of curiosities.

The great fire of London in 1666 destroyed the buildings of the College of Physicians, and with them all the priceless collections left by Dr. Gilbert, only a few folio volumes being saved.

A quotation from Fuller's *Worthies*, p. 332, will fitly close this narrative:

"William Gilbert was born in Trinity Parish¹ in Colchester, his Father being a Counsellour of great Esteem in his Profession, who first removed his family thither from Clare in Suffolk, where they had resided in a Gentile Equipage some Centuries of Years. He had (saith my informer) the Cleareness of Venice Glasse without the Brittle ness thereof, soon ripe and Long Lasting in his Perfections. He commenced Doctor in Physick, and was Physician to Queen Elizabeth, who stamped on him many Marks of her Favour, besides an Annual Pension to encourage his Studies. He addicted himself to Chemistry, attaining to great exactness therein. One saith of him that he was Stoicall, but not Cynicall,

¹ "I received the ensuing intelligence from his near kinsman Mr. William Gilbert of Brental Ely in Suffolk."

which I understand Reserv'd, but not Morose, never married, purposely to be more beneficiall to his Brethren. Such his loyalty to the Queen that as if unwilling to survive, he dyed in the same year with her 1603. His stature was Tall, Complexion Cheerfull, an Happines not ordinary in so hard a Student and retired a Person. He lyeth buried in Trinity Church in Colchester, under a plain Monument.

“Mahomet's tomb at Mecha is said strangely to hang up, attracted by some invisable Loadstone; but the Memory of this Doctor will never fall to the Ground, which his incomparable book *De Magnete* will support to Eternity.”

This note on William Gilbert as Physician was prepared by Silvanus P. Thompson for the Commemoration on December 10th, 1903, of the Three-hundredth Anniversary of his death, and is now printed by Charles Whittingham and Company at the Chifwick Press.

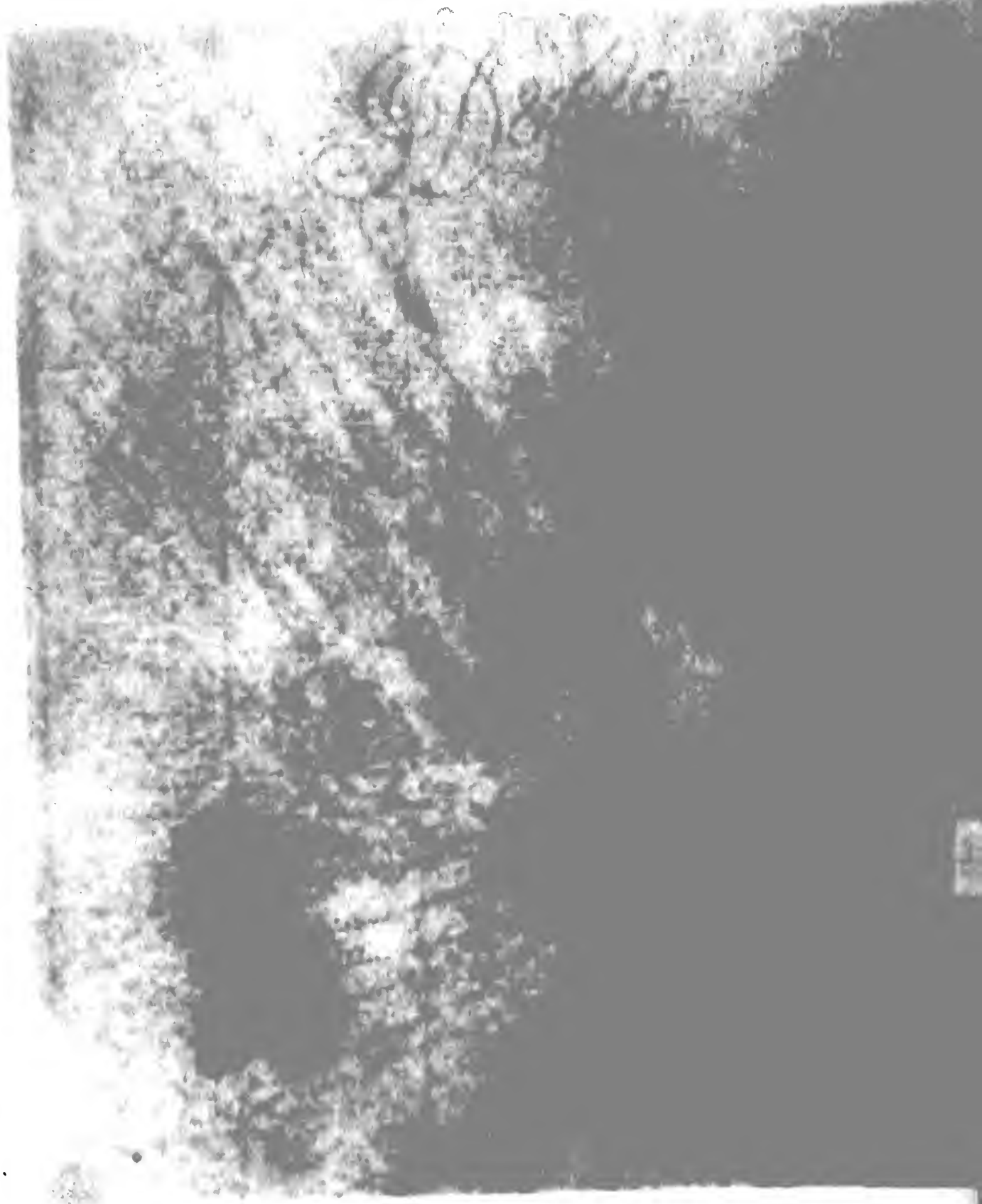
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